

Guardians of the Truth, Part 1

1 Timothy 3:14-16

I wanted to introduce the topic this morning by acknowledging an obvious fact, we are living, as you know, in some interesting days, some very turbulent, troubling times in our country. We've recently witnessed, if you've been watching the news, some pretty serious social unrest. So very sad to see the anger that's been expressed toward law enforcement. It's been sad to see the loss of life, loss of dignity. We understand that social unrest, whether, whether it's driven by racial tensions, the use of authority, labor disputes, whatever, that kind of social unrest ebbs and flows throughout history. You just kinda continue looking back in history, as you study it, social unrest is always with us. It's part of the evils of the curse; it's part of the evils of sin. And if you tie all of it back and ask for an underlying reason for all the social unrest, sin is at the root of it all.

But perhaps even more surprising than even that kind of social unrest in our society is this radical moral revolution. And it's been represented most recently by the demand to legitimate and to celebrate same-sex marriage. If there's any remaining question as to whether or not our country is traveling down the Romans road, not that Gospel tract presentation, but the Romans road of Romans 1:22-32, those questions were answered.

The real question for this morning, for us Christians is this question: How did this moral revolution happen in a self-professedly Christian nation? I mean, it's come so quickly, and with such an aggressive demand, not just for toleration, but a demand for celebration. It's not enough to tolerate homosexuality. If you're not rejoicing in it, you're out. How did this happen in our Christian nation?

Well, the full answer to that question is multi-layered, and it really goes beyond the scope of what we need to accomplish this morning. But I just want to say this word. Paul summarizes God's answer to that question in Romans 1:21-23. He says this "Although they knew God, they did not honor him as God

or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images...”

That’s idolatry. That’s the fundamental issue. Rather than liv, than worshiping the living God, Americans have worshipped the dead gods of modernity: productivity, human potential, wealth, progress, scientific discovery and pragmatism. Americans have been bowing before those idols for more than a century. And therefore, Romans 1:24, 26, and 28, “God gave them over.” He gave them over to his judgment. And that’s what we’re suffering in American right now. The real question, here, in my mind, is Why has God withheld his judgment of giving us over for so long? He’s certainly demonstrated his patience.

It would be easy for us to point the finger at the world, to blame all the corruption we see on the pagans outside the gates, beyond the membership of the church, but you know what? The moral actors on today’s stage are church members. These days we’re watching church after church cave in on the issue of gay marriage.

Listen, Christian faithfulness requires us not to skirt these issues, beloved. To go silent, to speak only of the truths that are not under attack in the moment, is to refuse to do what God has put the church on earth to do, to be salt and light. The Christian church and every local expression of the Christian church is salt, preserving the society around it. It's light, a warning to the culture and a pointing of the culture to Christ. Listen by simply conducting ourselves in the church faithful to God's Word, we stand here as a protest to an ungodly culture. That is part of the church's role in society.

Sadly, that's not what's been going on. The church has largely abandoned that crucial and vital role in its witness. Throughout the past century in America, many churches and denominations have embraced something called, modernity. Now when I speak about modernity, we're really talking about here a secular religion. Modernity, it's the word modern. Modern, modernity it's characterized by faith in human potential and perfectibility. It's characterized by individual liberty and self-autonomy. It's known to be in favor of all scientific and evolutionary progress.

The attributes and attitudes of modernity actually go all the way back to the founding of our nation. The founding fathers of our country, some of whom were Deists. Deists had no problem acknowledging God as Creator, but they believed he had and has no continuing involvement in the world. The god of the Deists left mankind to work out his way in the world, because he put the light of his nature in them and they could find their own way. That's the spirit of modernity. It's in the air we breathe. It's in the assumptions of every social argument, every cultural debate. Modernity is the foundation of everything that is taught in schools and colleges and universities. The religion of modernity prefers the contemporary to the historical. It favors the city over the country, the urban over the rural. And it wants to see industrialization and progress continue to build and build and build until we have a human utopia, and bring back that holy grail, a form of eternal life, without God. Modernity is nothing more than a sophisticated form of human pride, undergirded by science and scholarship.

The major denominations were the first to compromise with modernity. At first, they were intimidated by science; then they

became enamored by it. They bowed before modern science, choosing to interpret the Bible in light of scientific knowledge rather than to accept God's testimony of how things happen, and then start their scientific, inqur, inquiry from his vantage point.

First, the liberal modernists stopped emphasizing the supernatural; then they denied it altogether. Belief in the supernatural was considered passé, out of vogue, simplistically and hopelessly pre-modern, and unsophisticated. So liberal preachers preached about natural law, and the natural moralism, common to all humanity. No more talk of a transcendent law of God, no more talk about sin, about moral accountability, about judgment and hell.

But it wasn't just the liberal denominations that compromised with modernity. Bible believing evangelical churches, though they began with a concern about the liberal modernity that overtook the mainline denominations, evangelical churches also came under the influence of modernity. The spirit of modernity, has, has blown through evangelical churches in two subtle but equally devastating forms: entertainment and

consumerism. The thirst for entertainment and the demands of the marketplace have probably done more damage to evangelical churches than the skepticism and the denials of a more formal theological liberalism. One example of how the spirit of entertainment entered the church is found right here in Greeley, Colorado.

In 1948, an Egyptian Muslim student named Sayyid Qutb came here to study at the State College of Education. Phil Johnson actually wrote a fascinating, excellent article about this. Sayyid Qutb was invited during his time here in 1948-1949 he was invited to a local Methodist church where, immediately after the religious service, the minister encouraged the young folks to dance together in the church. As a conservative-minded Muslim, that mix of the sacred with the profane absolutely shocked him. Qutb wrote about that experience in his book *The American I Have Seen*, and he cited it as one of the evidences that Americans didn't take their religion too seriously. He actually despised what he saw, and it fueled his rejection of Western values and Christianity. Phil Johnson writes this, quote, "Qutb went back to Egypt, seething with outrage and contempt against the West's unbridled, materialistic selfism; and he began to produce the

body of writings that became the manifestos and chief handbooks for today's Islamo-fascism. Qutb was chief mentor to Ayman al-Zawahiri, who mentored Osama ben-Laden." End quote.

So now you know the story, all the problems we've experienced with Al-Qaeda, Isis, all can be traced back to young people dancing in a Methodist church, right? No, that's not true. But it does illustrate for you the impact on people's minds of blending the church with entertainment. I continue to see examples of people bringing all manner of entertainment into the church. I watched a video recently where a pastor, well-known megachurch pastor, was preaching from the driver's seat of a Ferrari up on stage, pretty cool. Another video showed someone in a church service riding a bull. Yeah, like a rodeo, a bull. People blended their favorite pastimes and created their own brand of churches, cowboy church, biker church. There's even an MMA church, mixed martial arts church, not making that up. It's a ministry called, Fight Pastor. The spirit of fun, levity, and entertainment has become quite an influence. It has brought the spirit of modernity right into evangelical churches.



But it's not just entertainment that's led to a compromise with modernity. The spirit of modernity has entered the church through materialism as well. Consumerism has turned the church into a marketplace. The pragmatic demands of consumerism has turned every church member, every parishioner, into a potential customer. They come to the church to examine a product, the sermon, the music, the atmosphere, all of it's viewed through the eyes of a potential customer. And church leaders ask the question, What will the newcomer like? What, what will be acceptable to the visitor who sees our church for the first time? Will they like our product? Will they like what they put together? Will it be comfortable here?

That mentality has turned everything in the church into a commodity. It's made merchandise of the Gospel and all its derivatives. You can even buy church related products. Sermons, you can buy them online and preach them to your congregation. You can buy pre-packaged worship music. You can buy entire worship services, all available to you at a very reasonable price. So you want to set up a church? Just plug in the Internet and pull it up. Turns out evangelicalism is big business,

especially in Christian publishing. It's worth billions of dollars, that's billions with a, B.

The consumer-driven, market-driven environment, all the publishing, the conferencing, the retail selling, all of that has produced what one writer aptly described as the evangelical industrial complex. It's a very apt description. According to Skye Jethani, here's how that works. It's an extended quote, listen, "Through any number of methods, powerful gifting, shrewd marketing, dumb luck, a pastor leads a congregation to megachurch status.

"Publishers eager for a guaranteed sales win offer the megachurch pastor, a book deal. Knowing that if only a third of the pastor's own congregation buys a copy, it's still a profitable deal. The book is published on the basis of the leader's market platform, not necessarily the strength of his ideas or the book's quality. Sometimes the pastor will actually write the book. Other times a ghost writer hired by the publisher will do the hard work of transforming his sermon notes into 180 pages with something resembling a coherent idea. Wanting to maximize the return on their investment, the

publisher will then promote the pastor at a publisher sponsored ministry conference or other events.

“As a result of the pastor, pastor’s megachurch customer base and the publisher’s conference platform, the book becomes a best seller. Or if that doesn’t work, sometimes, sugar daddies, purchase thousands of copies of the book to literally buy the pastor onto the best seller’s list, where the perception of popularity results in more sales. This market driven cycle of megachurches, conferences, and publishers results in an echo chamber, where the same voices espousing the same values create an atmosphere where ministry success becomes equated with audience aggregation.” End quote.

That description of the evangelical industrial complex, the celebrity pastor phenomenon, the, the conferencing, the publishing, add all that to the entertainment minded, fun-seeking culture, sprinkle it with a superficial Bible teaching by people who don’t even know any better anymore, and the old evangelicalism has been cannibalized to become the liberalism it reacted against. Trouble is, these kinds of evangelicals, these neo-evangelicals, still think they’re faithful to Scripture.

They don't recognize the drift that's taken place and their pride at holding on to the old rugged cross, it goes unchecked as they wave the banner for biblical fidelity they no longer practiced, a biblical fidelity that they've long since abandoned and you can't tell them anything different.

Now amid all that activity, the transic, transactions, all the web site hits, accounting, the sales, the conferences, the blogs, the bestselling books, is it any surprise, amid all that distraction, that the current moral crisis has come upon us? Is it really a shock that many evangelical churches are embracing this moral revolution? How did this happen? Look, I can tell you in every case, maybe at different rates and in different ways, but in every case churches lost sight of exactly what it means to be a church. They forgot what the purpose of the local church actually is, and they forgot what involvement, significant involvement, in the church actually means. Why it's important to invest themselves, invest their lives throughout the rest of their lives in the local church, in building it, in strengthening it. Instead, they put their sights on the parachurch. They go outside, and they, they fulfill some desire

for ministry outside the church, rather than building it right here.

Now with all that in mind, turn in your Bibles to 1 Timothy 3. Yeah, all that was introduction. But just a little bit to go. Little bit to go. We're going to look at some of the clearest statements on the purpose of the church. The most succinct statement on the purpose of the church in all the New Testament, Jesus said, in Matthew 16:18, He said, "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Praise God for that! But sometimes, when you look around, it can be hard to find that unconquerable church under the dark shadow of this evangelical industrial complex. But make no mistake, it's there.

"Nevertheless," 2 Timothy 2:19, "God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: 'The Lord knows those who are his,' and 'Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.'" That's us, beloved. That's you. That's me. God knows us, and he keeps us, even carrying us through some very confusing times. He protects us in the refuge of a local church that knows its place and knows its purpose in the world.

Take a look at it there, 1 Timothy 3:14. Paul says to Timothy, "I hope to come to you soon, but I'm writing these things to you so that if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth. Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness. He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory."

That, whether you recognize it or not, that is a crucial text. Absolutely vital because it spells out clearly and explicitly the nature of the church. It spells out its role in the world and the method by which it carries out its purpose. So those are going to be the three points of your outline: The nature, the role, the method of the church. Let's get into that first point: nature. What is the nature of the church? Well, the church is God's family. That's what its DNA is, it's God's family.

After being released from his first Roman imprisonment recorded at the end of Acts, Paul traveled to visit the churches he'd planted. Coming to Ephesus, he found some significant problems in the church: false doctrine, disorderly worship, unqualified leaders, and materialism. So he left the situation in the capable hands of his protégé Timothy and then continued on to Macedonia. And after arriving in Macedonia, realizing he wouldn't be able to make it back to Ephesus as soon as he'd hoped, Paul wrote this letter to help Timothy in the work in that church. Difficult work, that's where we pick it up in verse 14. "I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth."